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ABSTRACT

Recent criticism of rhetorical invention faults the discipline for not promoting "advanced literacy," defined as the use of critical reading and writing abilities to serve social ends. Aristotle's vision of rhetoric has contributed significantly to a cognitive view of invention, but Aristotle also acknowledged the importance of social context. Invention as an intuitive, natural gift assumed a minor role in eighteenth and nineteenth century rhetoric, as evidenced in the philosophy of George Campbell, who paid little attention to the social aspects of invention. He held almost exclusively to an inductive model of thinking--one that, for a rhetor, is automatic and unconscious. In contrast to both Aristotle and Campbell, Linda Flower has informed her theories of invention with extensive research, making primary use of protocol analysis and cognitive psychology. While Aristotle emphasized deduction and Campbell emphasized induction, Flower plays freely between both modes of thinking. For her, invention assumes a crucial role that leads to a focus on reader-needs and reader-based prose, since her research indicates the importance of audience in the construction of a text. In conclusion, students should be taught cognitive approaches to invention as well as social approaches, and, in fact, should be encouraged to try several different approaches to invention in addressing a single problem. (NKA)

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RHETORICAL INVENTION AND ADVANCED LITERACY: AN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

John Hagaman

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RHETORICAL INVENTION AND ADVANCED LITERACY:
AN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Recent criticism of rhetorical invention, particularly of cognitive-based perspectives, faults it for not promoting "advanced literacy" or--according to one definition--the utilization of critical reading and writing abilities to serve social ends. If this criticism is valid, then how we view invention or how we teach it--or both--should be altered.

It is my intent to review recent criticism of invention and to consider briefly both cognitive and social perspectives in three theorists--Aristotle, George Campbell, and Linda Flower--to interpret this criticism.

I conclude that we should indeed view the teaching of invention--and writing itself--as social acts. At the same time, however, we need a multi--faceted view of invention in order to serve advanced literacy. Our primary goal should be to integrate rather than exclude cognitive, social, and expressive perspectives, and as much as practical, to encourage writers to use more than one perspective in addressing a single problem as their intentions warrant.

CRITICISM OF CONTEMPORARY INVENTION:

Much recent criticism has been directed at structured heuristics. For example, writing of D'Angelo's cognitive-based theory of the topoi, David Harrington claims that thought is inhibited: D'Angelo's

patterns imply "that one can discover material for a composition by more or less filling in the blanks of an empty structure, what we might call a 'coloring book' technique for generating ideas" (650). Rather than offer choice, D'Angelo's theory provides the "relics" or "aftermath" of choice. Others claim that the grids or cells of Young, Becker, and Pike's tagmemic heuristic lock out natural thinking processes, and further, that abstract models of how writers solve problems--such as Flower and Hayes's--isolate writers from their social surroundings (Murphy, 9).

Nor do less structured inventional approaches escape criticism. Free or associative writing is said to trivialize thinking which, by implication, might be better modeled on the rigors of classical logic. In addition, free approaches are thought to limit writers to the discovery of personal truths.

Now what is particularly troublesome is the belief that writers fail at invention because they are isolated from meaningful contexts. Perhaps the most thorough expression of this view is made by Karen Burke LeFevre, who in Invention as a Social Act characterizes contemporary invention as "the private act of an individual writer for the particular event of producing a text . . . It leads us to study the individual inventor apart from socio-cultural contexts; it depicts invention as a closed, one-way system, and the inventor as an atomistic unit, abstrated from society; and it fails to acknowledge that invention is often a collaborative process" (1, 32). This position of isolation is what puts invention in direct conflict with the goals of advanced literacy.

WHAT IS ADVANCED LITERACY?

According to Program Chair David Bartholomae, "advanced" differs

from "basic" literacy in that critical skills are "being used in the service of appropriate social and intellectual ends." "To be literate," he argues, requires "the ability to participate actively and knowingly in one's culture . . . The emphasis, in every case, is not on some abstract skill but on students' abilities to work with languages already in context, to participate in discussions that have already begun and that have their own key terms, procedures and agendas." Thus, participation is a central aspect of advanced literacy, an aspect that is reinforced by Kenneth Bruffee, who argues that "knowledge itself is an inherently social artifact and learning an inherently social phenomena" (745), and by Charles Yarnoff, who insists that the only purpose a required composition course can have is "to give students a way to comprehend the interaction of their ideas and their social experience" (553).

In a narrow sense and at the outset, invention appears to have been unconcerned with such participation. It sought the location and memorization of topics to apply to specific persuasive situations. Yet Elbert Harrington insists that a "broad" view of invention existed simultaneous with the narrow, one that has grown in prominence today so that rhetorical invention is frequently viewed not as memorization or recall, but as invention in a generic sense--as discovery of new materials. Further, recent renewed interest in classical texts such as Aristotle's Rhetoric has revealed that participation is indeed an important aspect of classical invention; in fact, the classical tradition may provide a precedent for contemporary views.

INVENTION AND LITERACY IN ARISTOTLE'S RHETORIC

First, we should acknowledge that Aristotle's vision of rhetoric has contributed significantly to a cognitive view of invention.

Aristotle's theories are based primarily on logical deduction and constitute a conscious, structured system in which individuals apply general topics to situations in order to find lines of argument. While such mental operation may initially appear restrictive and artificial, it represents a "dynamic method" that leads "the mind from one thing to another" (Grimaldi, 177, 84) through the analytic topics or "modes of inference," which are based on principles that perceptions group themselves according to their similarity, dissimilarity, and proximity.

In addition, Aristotle acknowledges the importance of social context, and in fact, implies that rhetors should co-operate with their audiences to help shape texts. This view arises since rhetoric is a counterpart of dialectic, an art that "implies that knowledge can be created in the activity of discourse . . . and as something that people <u>do</u> together, rather than as something which any one person, outside of discourse, <u>has</u> " (Gage, 156). Thus, in constructing enthymemes, or arguments with an implied premise, rhetors are to assume that their audiences will supply the missing assumptions. "The premises which go into making [the enythmeme] are derived from, or contributed by, an audience which does not already share the conclusion" (Gage, 157). As a result, Lloyd Bitzer believes Aristotelian arguments "are jointly produced" and "intimately unite speaker and audience" (151). And in describing the topics as a "quick survey of opinion" of "things that people generally consider persuasive," Kenneth Burke sees their use as a means of identification with audience, an act he coins "the function of sociality" (239). This sociality can also be found in Aristotle's discussion of epideictic rhetoric: according to Christine Oravec, "the rhetor

receives common values and experience from his audience and, by reshaping them in artistic language, returns those experiences heightened and renewed" (171-172). Overall, while contemporary theorists of invention find cognitive roots in Aristotle, at the same time contemporary critics can find justification for a social view of invention. In Aristotle, both perspectives are valued.

INVENTION AND LITERACY IN CAMPBELL'S RHETORIC

In contrast to Aristotle's contribution to inventional theory, George Campbell's is less positive although hardly less significant. Campbell's linking of mental operation and invention in the Philosophy of Rhetoric (1776) supports similar contemporary views; yet since Campbell only implies that knowing is a conscious process and certainly an infrequent one, invention as an intuitive and natural gift assumes a minor role in 18th and 19th century rhetoric. Its contemporary rise in prominence comes about, in part, as a reaction against this unconsciousness. In addition, Campbell pays little attention to the social aspects of creation. Ideas occur naturally to individuals and without their intervention; the rhetor is a communicator of truths rather than joint creator.

Campbell is one of the first theorists to interrelate the new scientific induction and rhetoric. In his preface to the Philosophy he states:

> It is his purpose in this Work, on the one hand, to exhibit, he does not say, a correct map, but a tolerable sketch of the human mind; . . . and, on the other, . . . to ascertain with greater precision, the radical principles of that art . . . [which is] to operate on the soul of the hearer (xliii).

Unlike Aristotle, Campbell holds almost exclusively to an inductive

model of thinking, one that for a rhetor is automatic and unconscious. In essence, he eliminates discovery from invention and leaves it the task of managing resources (primarily those of arrangement) in order to persuade an audience of truths that other disciplines have determined.

Perhaps one reason that Campbell doesn't believe reality is socially constructed is his faith in common sense philosophy: the material world exists independent of the observer and is knowable through the senses. Otherwise, writes Campbell, the investigation of truth "would be an endless and a fruitless task; we would be eternally proving, whilst nothing could be proved" (42). This view becomes an important part of current-traditional rhetoric, which also diminishes socially created knowledge: "Current-traditional rhetoric demands that the audience be as 'objective' as the writer; both shed personal and social concerns in the interests of the unobstructed perception of empirical reality" (Berlin, 775).

Overall, Campbell is an important transitional figure between classical and contemporary rhetoric. He helps us understand why contemporary invention has not emphasized until recently a social perspective, and he is therefore important if invention is to promote advanced literacy.

INVENTION AND LITERACY IN FLOWER'S RHETORIC

In contrast to Aristotle and Campbell, Linda Flower has informed her theories of invention by extensive research, making primary use of protocal analysis and collaborating with cognitive psycholgist John Hayes. From such research comes Problem-Solving Strategies for Writing (2nd edition, 1985). The text shares Aristotle's belief that invention is a conscious and structured process.

Yet while Aristotle emphasizes deduction and Campbell induction, Flower plays freely between both modes of thinking. For example, she details a nine-step heuristic in which invention assumes a crucial role as writers are told to brainstorm, then expand their private code words through structured analysis; to consider their self-images in writing, then focus on reader-needs and design reader-based prose. Writers are told to identify with their readers since "readers remember not what we tell them, but what they tell themselves" (138). For Flower, "effective writers are not simply expressing what they know. . . Instead they are using their knowledge--reorganizing, maybe even rethinking their ideas to meet the demands of an assignment or the needs of their reader" (p. 132).

Certainly Flower's research indicates that audience plays an important role in the writer's construction of a text. She describes the process as "creative" (37) and dynamic, and in so doing is supported by psychological theory: "[M]ental processes are bipolar in nature, determined, on the one hand, by the external world and, on the other, by inner needs. From moment to moment, these influences interplay in the course of thought, with external stimuli dominating at one time and internal stimuli at another. At no time can it be said that either is independent of the other. . ." (Vinacke, 160).

Despite this interractiveness, Flower has been taken to task, in effect, for not promoting advanced literacy. LeFevre believes that "even when students are allowed to brainstorm ideas together or act as peer evaluators in group discussion, the implicit assumption is that others are there primarily to assist the individual. The text that results is usually seen not as a social invention by collaborators but as the property of the person whose name appears at the top of the

page" (13).

Perhaps LeFevre is correct that true collaboration does not occur; but an exclusively held social view of invention as requiste for advanced literacy may be incorrect as well. For at the same time writing is a social act, it is also a private one. "One of our most mature uses of language," reasons Peter Elbow, "is for building verbal pictures and structures for their own sake--not just for communicating with others" (58). Writing helps develop "the reflective and private dimension of our mental lives" (60-61). Perhaps this is the legitimate legacy of those who came after Campbell. In addition, several personality theorists lend support to this private view: while some writers are field dependent and need contexts--including social ones--to form meaning, others are field independent and possess analytic strengths arising from an impersonal orientation (Messick, p. 14). And, finally, a social view of invention may impede rather than promote thought. Ideas held by groups are traditionally difficult--sometimes impossible--for groups to change. One of the characteristics of writing is that, according to John Warnock, it makes possible "a new and meaningful freedom from immediate social context, a freedom to imagine, to project . . ." (4). A social view of invention has much to commend, but so does the cognitive perspective. Rather than view them as totally separate theories, an integration is desirable.

IMPLICATIONS FOR ADVANCED LITERACY AND CONTEMPORARY INVENTION

In a democracy, rhetorical invention must promote--or at least be compatible with--advanced literacy. Yet the way to strengthen collaboration may lie in initial introspection. By turning off "the babble of outside voices in the head" (Elbow, 65), we may hear own

inner voices more clearly and, consequently, be more able to listen to others. Contrarily, while attending to others, we may recognize more readily our own voices. By reading Aristotle, we more fully understand Campbell; by reading Campbell, we more completely understand Aristotle. Reading both, we gain better perspective on current theory. Contrary to several critics, contemporary invention--particularly a cognitive-based approach--is not in direct conflict with the goals of advanced literacy; it is an important component of it.

In conclusion, we should continue to teach our students cognitive approaches to invention such as the Pentad, the classical topics, and Flower's nine-step problem-solving heuristic. As well, we should teach social approaches--such as Macrorie's Helping Circle, Elbow's teacherless writing groups, and Gordon's Synectics. Nor can we ignore expressive techniques such as free writing, meditation, clustering, and journals. Above all, we should lead students to try several different approaches to invention in addressing a single problem, depending on occasions, learning styles, and intentions in writing. Individual free writing may enable a writer to engage in more profitable group brainstorming; engagement in Synectics may enable a writer to achieve his own synthesis. In short, we can best serve advanced literacy in our classrooms by promoting contrary, yet enabling ideas about invention.

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